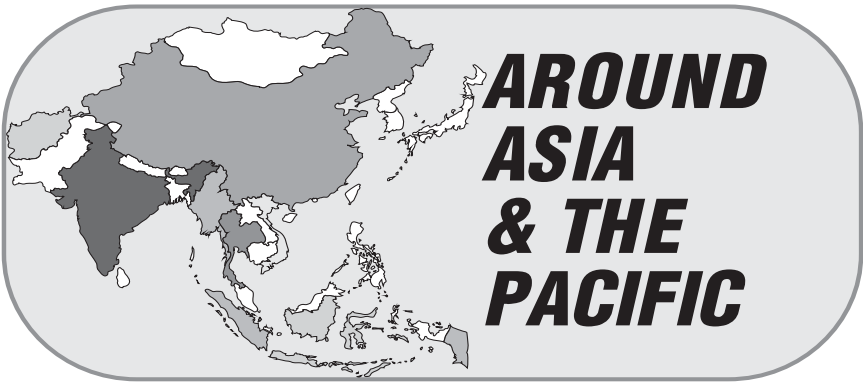




Rangers free six trapped baby elephants in Thailand

BANGKOK (AP) — Six baby elephants, trapped in a mud hole and separated from their parents, have been rescued by a team of park rangers in northeastern Thailand. The rangers came across the elephant calves as they struggled to climb the pit’s slippery banks, according to officials of Thap Lan National Park. Some of the rangers went for help, while others spent the night with the baby elephants. As the elephants wallowed together at one side of the pit, rangers at the other side spent four hours using hoes and pickaxes to dig out enough mud to form a ramp. Video of the great elephant escape released by the Department of National Parks showed the animals climbing out of the muck and quickly heading into the forest, a few dozen yards away. The rangers cheered the elephants on, with comments like “Go, go on, child!” One elephant struggled, slipped, and fell, but finally all made it out of the muck. The last of the animals then lingered, after all the others made it past the tree line. It faced the rangers for a moment, turned, paused, and finally ran into the jungle. “Gone, they’re gone,” cried a ranger, as the rescue crew came together to celebrate. Park chief Prawatsart Chantep said there were signs that a herd of elephants believed to be related to the trapped infants was circling the area.

Sumatran tiger cubs explore jungle habitat in Sydney zoo

SYDNEY (AP) — Three boisterous 10-week-old rare Sumatran tiger cubs play-wrestled and explored their jungle habitat in their first public appearance at a Sydney zoo. Taronga Zoo manager Mandy Everett said the cubs were born January 17 to first-time mother Kartika. The female cubs were named Mawar, or Rose in Indonesian, and Tengah Malam, which means Midnight. The male’s name is Pemanah, or Archer. Everett says Sumatran tigers are the most critically endangered tiger subspecies and are under increasing pressure as their jungle habitat shrinks. She said the Taronga cubs will likely grow up to become part of breeding programs in other zoos around the world.

China to give \$989 million to build highway in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — China has agreed to provide a loan of \$989 million to Sri Lanka to build an expressway that will connect the island nation’s tea-growing central region to a China-run seaport on the southern coast. A finance ministry statement said the Export-Import Bank of China has agreed to provide a concessional loan covering 85 percent of the contract price for the expressway, whose total estimated cost is \$1.16 billion. The loan comes as Sri Lanka struggles to repay \$5.9 billion in foreign loans this year. Much of Sri Lanka’s foreign debt is from China.

Saris stand out on Indian fashion runway

NEW DELHI (AP) — It’s fashion season in India’s capital, with the country’s top designers showcasing their latest collections to lure the rapidly growing domestic and export markets for Indian haute couture. Before the styles debut on the runway lie days of planning, fittings, and hair and makeup sessions to experiment with looks, poses, and choreography. Just days ahead of the big show, tailors take models’ measurements and fashion designers finish rehearsing. The show celebrated the *sari*, Indian women’s most idiosyncratic garment, six yards of fabric that symbolize a centuries-old tradition. “As a long piece of fabric, it’s not easy to drape, a lot of designers have worked on it over time and it is being styled differently to inspire the younger generation to wear,” Vaishali S., a Mumbai-based designer, said of the sari. Models sashayed down the runway in a riot of color and glitz as Delhi socialites, Bollywood stars, and prospective buyers watched for the season’s next “it” items. The sari was juxtaposed with other Indian ensembles, western wear, and fusion clothing collections for men and women. The show finale was an ode to the sari, worn by the runway models in modern, reconstructed forms, along with elaborate jewelry and accessories against striking backdrops. Vaishali said the saris on the runway paid tribute to the great variety across India of “weaves, textures, drapes, and fabrics with every state and every village having its own strongly distinct and contemporary style, alive and evolving.” At the end, avid fashionistas in the audience blended in with fashion models as buyers thronged the stalls of designers, who offered their creations for sale, pret-a-porter.

Worsening air pollution reducing lifespans in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Indonesia’s air quality has deteriorated from among the cleanest in the world to one of the most polluted over the past two decades, shaving five years from life expectancy in some regions, researchers say. The study by the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago says an increase in coal-fired power stations, burning of land for plantation agriculture, and rising car ownership are responsible for the worsening pollution in the world’s fourth-most populous country. The greatest spike happened in the last few years with air pollution more than doubling between 2013 and 2016, it said. The burden on public health has become one of the highest in the world, behind only India, China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. “High air pollution is now undermining Indonesians’ health,” said researchers Michael Greenstone and Qing Fan. “In 1998, air pollution barely impacted the life expectancy of Indonesians. In fact, even in 2013, it shaved only a few months off of average life expectancy.” According to the researchers, sustained high concentrations of particulate matter in the air people breath will cut 2.3 years from lifespans in the capital of Jakarta. On the islands of Sumatra and Borneo, both of which suffer land fires every year, the expected reduction in lifespans is four years on average. It rises to 4.8 years for the southern Sumatran city of Palembang and 5.6 years for its neighboring Ogan Komering Ilir district.



CURBING CONGESTION. A Mass Rapid Transit train passes by during a trial run in Jakarta, Indonesia, in this February 21, 2019 file photo. Commuting in the gridlocked Indonesian capital will for some involve less frustration, sweat, and fumes. The 10-mile system running south from Jakarta’s downtown is the first phase of a development that if fully realized will plant a cross-shaped network of stations serving an area with 30 million people. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim, File)

Indonesia’s first subway opens in its gridlocked capital

By Niniek Karmini
The Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Indonesia’s long-awaited first subway opened in the country’s capital with the aim of relieving crippling traffic gridlock in Southeast Asia’s biggest economy.

Minutes after inaugurating the 10-mile transit line running south from Jakarta’s downtown, President Joko Widodo presided over a groundbreaking ceremony to mark the beginning of the second phase: a five-mile northward line planned for completion by 2024. The two projects are being built at a cost of \$2.6 billion.

“Today we will begin a new civilization by operating the first phase of Mass Rapid Transit in Jakarta,” Widodo told several thousand guests and residents at the inauguration.

The new line that opened includes seven elevated and six underground stations built by two consortiums of local and Japanese companies. Passengers rode for free until the end of March, after which operator PT MRT Jakarta began charging the equivalent of between 70 cents and \$1.

Widodo, who is campaigning for re-election, told the crowd that he has instructed Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan to begin the next phase of construction of an east-west line covering a distance of about 54 miles this year.

Jakarta’s first subway line, the latest of many infrastructure improvements across the world’s fourth most populous nation, is aimed at helping it catch up with other Southeast Asian capitals such as Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and Bangkok in public transport.

Jakarta is officially home to about 10 million people, but the population of the greater metropolitan area swells to 30 million.

The project, funded through a loan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), has been planned since the 1980s, but its construction was hampered by political crises, red tape, and funding disagreements. Widodo was the Jakarta governor when construction finally kicked off in October 2013.

JICA has predicted that without a major investment in transportation, Jakarta would be overwhelmed by traffic jams by 2020. Annual losses from congestion are forecast to reach \$6.5 billion by next year.

Congestion has relentlessly worsened in the past decade as car ownership rose, squeezing more and more vehicles onto Jakarta’s unchanging road network. The average peak hour speed has “significantly decreased” to 6.2 miles per hour, according to the transport ministry. It often can take two or more hours to move three miles in some pockets of the city.

The line opened runs from the southern neighborhood of Lebak Bulus to Jakarta’s downtown and is expected to take less than 30 minutes.

In addition to the subway project, a \$2.4-billion elevated rail network linking Jakarta and its satellite cities is also taking shape, with the first stage expected to begin operating in April.

But it likely will take several years for new transit systems to make a dent in the congestion. About 1.4 million people commute into central Jakarta on work days. The initial subway line aims to carry only about 130,000 people a day by the end of this year.

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Japanese Yen	110.66
Laos New Kip	8614.1
Malaysian Ringgit	4.08
Nepal Rupee	111.31
Pakistani Rupee	140.6
Papua N.G. Kina	3.373
Philippine Peso	52.635
Russian Ruble	65.683
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Singapore Dollar	1.3543
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Taiwan Dollar	30.851
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